DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 215 064 UD 022 236

AUTHOR Webb, Michael Brian
TITLE Disadvantaged Minorities and the Arts.
PUB DATE Apr 82
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Association of Interdisciplinary and Ethnic Studies (10th, Santa Clara, CA, April 14-17, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; Aesthetic Education; Art Activities; *Art Education; *Cognitive Development; Cultural Influences; *Disadvantaged Youth; Elementary Secondary Education; *Improvement Programs; *Minority Group Children; Program Effectiveness; Psychological Characteristics; Reading Improvement; Research Needs

ABSTRACT

The inability of the schools to meet the educational needs of economically disadvantaged minority children has prompted efforts to identify alternatives to the traditional school curriculum. One such alternative emphasizes the use of the arts in developing basic academic skills. Research indicates that the arts can be used to develop perceptual skills which lead to complex and subtle views of reality that disadvantaged learners often fail to develop; that the arts can promote understanding of relationships basic to reading comprehension by providing opportunities for students to deal with abstractions; and that experience with the arts helps develop visual sophistication in disadvantaged students. In addition, motivation and enjoyment essential to learning are provided. Several educational programs in which arts activities have been integrated have demonstrated success in improving achievement and enhancing learning. Successful programs are generally characterized by the presence of an integrated curriculum, clearly defined objectives, teacher training, initial student assessment, an effective teacher-student ratio, sufficient time and facilities, and ongoing evaluation. While the growing body of research supports the significance of the arts in the education of the disadvantaged, other questions concerning the actual relationship between the arts and the dynamic forces in a school require further study. (Author/MJL)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED215064

# DISADVANTAGED MINORITIES AND THE ARTS

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Michael B. Webb

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

Michael Brian Webb

ERIC Clearinghouse
On Urban Education

Teachers College,
Columbia University
New York City, NY

1982

UD 022 236

Paper presented at the Tenth Annual Conference of the National Association of Interdisciplinary and Ethnic Studies, Santa Clara, California, April 14-17

> If cognition is a matter of becoming aware, of perceiving, then the senses and the arts play a crucial role in providing essential resources for education (Eisner, 1981).

During the last twenty years, the problems associated with the education of economically disadvantaged minority children and youths have received widespread attention. Continued evidence that the schools have not adequately met the educational needs of all students has prompted efforts to identify alternatives to the traditional school-based curriculum. One such alternative emphasizes the arts in developing basic academic skills, particularly reading skills. This paper is intended as an overview of issues relating to the role of the arts in the education of disadvantaged students.

The arts in the formal educational system have traditionally been viewed as an avenue for cultivating aesthetic awareness. The arts have frequently been relegated "add on", or extra-curricular status. Many educational psychologists have considered the arts to be emotive forms that might provide satisfaction, but not understanding (Eisner, 1981). Groff (1977), while questioning the positive effectiveness of art activities in reading programs, states that the use of art can be defended as a way of adding variety or diversion in the teaching of reading. He cautions, however, that the proposition that art activities have a direct influence on children's learning to read cannot be supported.

Despite these and other reservations concerning the uses of the arts in cognitive learning programs, the evidence supporting the potential of such a role is substantial. A number of school-based programs, many of them funded under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, have received favorable evaluations with respect to improving the academic performance of disadvantaged students. Studies have also underscored the utility of art education practices in meeting the educational and psychological needs of disadvantaged learners.

Several implication for the utilization of the arts as part of an integrated learning process can be derived from a brief review of selected literature on educational disadvantage.

One theme often expressed in the literature concerned with the education of disadvantaged minorities is that their poor academic performance reflects the low valuation they have learned for academic tasks (Banks and McQuater, 1976; Cohen, 1969; Block and Lieberman, 1968). In the case of Blacks, a significant proportion of whom can be categorized as economically disadvantaged, genetic factors have been advanced to account for underachievement (Jensen, 1969). Others have attempted to isolate cultural or social-situational determinants of underachievement among minorities (Bond, 1972; Gordon, 1974; Deutsch, 1963; Fishbach and Adelman, 1971).

Descriptions of the personality structure of the disadvantaged indicate an affinity for the concrete and a distrust of the theoretical (Silverman and Hoepfner, 1969). In general, economically disadvantaged minorities are

more dependent upon the school in learning to read, write, and do arithmetic than are middle class children.

Bond (1972) describes the significance of environmental factors - including the family, parents' education and occupation, the school and the community - in cognitive development. Luis Fuentes, formerly a superintendent in a predominantly minority district in New York City, takes another approach: "There is little mystery as to the basic cause of illiteracy - it is language." He observes that the language taught in the schools is often not the language spoken in the disadvantaged student's neighborhood and home.

Cohen (1969) summarizes the environmental factors view in terms of teachers' attitudes and instructional practices:

> Middle class children are "smarter" only in the sense that they are better prepared to read at the outset of their education and so sustained in that preparation by their home environment and by their teachers' expectations that the current poor or mediocre materials and methods are sufficient. The same methods and materials will not teach most lower class children to read and write. Less adequate methods and materials certainly will do worse. Why? Because lower class children come to school with less preparation to read. Perceptual dysfunctions and cognive deficits add up to low IQs. But perception and cognition as they are measured are learned behaviors. Thus, much of what is termed IQ is learned not innate.

Bernstein (1971) argues that middle and upper class members engage in a more elaborate form of verbal interaction than do lower class members.

The lesser social mobility of lower class members limits the range of communicative settings in which they can participate. Bernstein does not view the two forms as mutually exclusive; rather, he sees them as overlapping patterns of distribution in social space. Other researchers have used Bernstein's hypothesis as the basis for advancing the "deficit" position, a view that nonstandard forms of language reflect deficient forms of cognition (Hill, 1977).

Several implications emerge from the brief review above. It is no longer feasible to ignore the social, cultural and linguistic diversity of students in American schools. Instructional practices must incorporate this reality. Educators must be knowledgeable about the characteristics of students from economically and educationally disadvantaged environments. While environmental factors may contribute to the problems that many students encounter in school, research on the causes of disadvantage is not enough. They must be taught! The proposition that a substantial segment of the American population, living in a state of poverty and illiteracy can be free to be as they choose to be is wholly unacceptable (Cohen, 1969).

Individuals advocating the relevance of the arts to the education of the poor have argued that the arts, because they speak directly to the feelings, perceptions, and sensibilities of human beings, possess a capability for reaching children which is virtually unique (Murphy and Gross, 1968).

Research indicates that the organization of learning occurs at three levels of experience: building a repertoire of referents that can be used for interpreting new experience; processing experience through classifying,

ordering, interpreting, summarizing and imagining; and translating experience into symbols (Levin and Allen, 1976). The foundation for learning is laid at the perceptual level. The arts can be used to develop perceptual skills which lead to more complex and more subtle views of reality that disadvantaged learners often fail to develop (Murphy and Gross, 1968). Gerhard (1981) expresses the belief that the arts can contribute to the understanding of relationships basic to reading comprehension by providing opportunities for students to deal with abstractions and to form their own perceptual images related to those abstractions. Through the construction or production process, students come to understand the use of symbols to convey meaning. Or, in Piaget's words, "in order for a child to understand something, he must construct it himself - he must reinvent it (1972)."

Gerhard suggests two dimensions, basic to perception and reading, which can be taught through the arts. The first involves relational concepts that exist in nature, i.e., which are basic even to those who don't possess a written language. This set includes similarities and differences, forms and function, symmetry and asymmetry, time and space, and cause and effect. The second set, most closely related to reading, includes concepts of a higher level of abstraction, i.e., perception of symbolic stimuli, including the relationships between part and whole, symbols and codes, content and process, and categorizing and describing.

Hall (1979) in a discussion of the arts and reading, likened the arts to a structure in which students learn to express ideas, feelings and in which students reconstruct first-hand or primary experiences derived from their

environment. She reviewed 21 programs, in various settings (inner city, suburban, rural) in which the arts were integrated into the general school curriculum. All had the goal of improving the quality of education through the incorporation of arts activities in various subject areas. She reported a positive correlation between participation in the programs and reading scores, improved self concept and reduced vandalism.

Findings presented from a study of arts programs designed for disadvantaged youths (Silverman and Hoepfner, 1969) infer that arts experiencees can have an important role in developing visual sophistication, including the mental behavior utlized for making the great variety of visual discriminations required as one interacts with his or her environment.

The Arts and Compensatory Education, a conceptual framework for the integration of the arts into the general education curriculum, asserts that the arts require children to practice the same learning operations that are present in other forms of learning, such as experiencing, experimenting, and exploring, in order to perceive and discover. The arts represent an avenue for expanding and broadening the essential sensory link with experience - the learner's experience. A difference, rather than a deficit model is implicit here. The learner's pool of experience is not only valued, it becomes the means for formulating new arrangements and relationships and for communicating to others. The framework includes several assumptions related to the value of the disadvantaged learner's pool of experience. One of the most important among these is the use of the arts to enable learners to

demonstrate understanding of concepts even though they may not be able to articulate an understanding through language. The broad objective of the framework is to improve the basic skills of students with learning disadvantages. Basic skills are here defined as reading, writing, listening, speaking, and computational skills. The theme of difference as opposed to deficity runs throughout the framwork. The framework emphasizes the development of self value through awareness of self and through stressing the importance of incorporating the students' decisions and interpretations into learning activities. Motivation and enjoyment are viewed as essential ingredients in the learning environment.

Silverman picks up this last theme, hypothesizing that the arts can facilitate a positive attitude toward school and a better application of remembered experiences and ideas to the present.

Motivation and enjoyment also play a large role in the Title I Children's Program of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. The program focused on the improvement of reading and reading skills through motivation and interest in the arts and increased interest in academic curriculum areas. The program served economically disadvantaged students, ages 10 to 12, through an intensive, individualized remedial reading program with an arts format (dance, theater, music, painting, sculpture, drawing, printmaking, puupetry, crafts, filmmaking, photography and animation). Paricipants engaged in two reading oriented art workshops for the eight week period, in conjunction with small group or individual sessions that focused on the application of arts activities to reading and academic areas.

Students entered the program reading 2 - 5 years below grade level. After completing the program, their reading achievement equaled or surpassed the amount of growth expected of normal readers of the same age.

The integration of arts activities into the general education curriculum is a theme of the Learning About Learning Program in San Antonio, Texas. The program is structured to attempt to help disadvantaged learners to find and use their own style of learning, through creative arts activities that focus on problem solving and the relevance of arts skills to all areas of the curriculum and to daily living skills.

A series of reports from the Arts, Education and Americans, Inc. offer a number of ideas concerning the use of the arts for general education purposes:

> The arts can provide new insights into other content areas, reinforce key ideas and concepts and forge rewarding interdisciplinary links with the academic curriculum at all grade levels.

Examples are provided in the areas of social studies, where arts are used to deal imaginatively with the human experience and Science, in which students from a fourth grade classroom use drawing to mark the growth of plants and textures, shapes and lines to explore marine geology.

References on the arts and the education of disadvantaged learners appear to suggest several important characteristics of successful programs: an integrated curriculum (arts activities should be developed within the various subject areas), clearly-defined objectives, teacher training,

initial student assessment, an effective student/teacher ratio, sufficient time and facilities, and ongoing evaluation.

Lidstone (1979) considers the optimum student/teacher ratio to be 7/1 for elementary schools, 15/1 for junior high schools and 20/1 for secondary schools. He also emphasizes the importance of the integrity of the program among the school staff as a requisite for effective programs.

In "Learning to Read Through the Arts and Humanities," O'Brien focuses on a methodology for integrating arts into the reading curriculum. Art and reading teachers collaborate to first determine a vocabulary set. This set then becomes the basis for arts projects, which demonstrate the application of reading and writing assignments in a number of areas. Reading skills are thus developed as they apply to a given range of subjects and problems. A similar format is described in The Arts and Compensatory Education in which teachers and arts specialists formulate objectives and a range of possible learning activities - involving all areas of the curriculum - related to the objectives.

Finally, one must be cautious in advocating a role for the arts in the education of the disadvantaged. There is a dearth of research from which to definitively assess the actual influence of the arts in educational programs. Although many such programs appear to be successful, little is known about the actual relationship of the arts to the dynamic forces operating in a given school. How subordinate is the curriculum to the role of the teacher? How are effective interpersonal relationships

established for the purpose of collaborative teaching? How much time should be focused on arts activities? How are value differences, that may imperil communication avoided? While these and other questions remain, a growing body of documentation exists to support a meaningful role for the arts in the education of the disadvantaged.

REFERENCES


1. Armstrong, Carmen L. Art and the Urban Child: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Minneapolis, Minnesota, March 5, 1970. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 039290)

2. Banks, Curtis W. and McQuater, Gregory V. Achievement Motivation and Black Children. New York: ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, Fall 1976

3. Baratz, Joan and Shuy, Roger. Teaching Black Children to Read. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1969

4. Block, Elaine C. and Lieberman, Janet. Art and Music: Pathways to Reading. The Elementary School Journal, January 1968

5. Bond, Horace M. Black American Scholars: A Study of Their Beginnings. Detroit: Balamp Publishing Co., 1972

6. Brigham, Don L. The Arts: Sensory Ways of Knowing and Learning. NASSP Bulletin, v63, n430, November 1979 (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ210 880)

7. Cohen, Alan S. Teach Them All to Read: Theory, Methods, and Materials for Teaching the Disadvantaged. New York: Random House, 1969

8. Corwin, Sylvia K. Developing Collaborative Teams in High Schools Consisting of Reading Specialists and Art Specialists: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association, Miami, Florida, May 2-6, 1977. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED144 031)

9. Eisner, Elliot. The Contribution of Painting to Children's Cognitive Development. Journal of Curriculum Studies, v11, n2, April-June 1979 (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ210 199)

10. Eisner, Elliot. The Role of the Arts in Cognition and Curriculum. Phi Delta Kappan, v63, n1, September 1981 (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ249 917)

11. Frelich, Alan and Anerson, Barry. Does Changing School Environments Change the Academic Performance of Minority Students? Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, Los Angeles, California, April 1981

12. Gerhard, Christian. Improving Reading Comprehension: Teaching Relationships Through the Arts: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the United Kingdom Reading Association, Edinburgh, Scotland, July 1981 (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED107 010)

13. Groff, Patrick. Can Art Develop Reading Ability? Reading, v11, n3, December 1977 (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ212 261)

14. Hall, Barbara A. The Arts and Reading: Coming to Our Senses: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Claremont Reading Conference, Claremont, California, January 19, 1979 (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED170 706)

15. Jones, Lonna B. Another Way to Learn. American Education, v17, n4, May 1981 (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ245 262)

16. Levin, Joel R. and Allen, Vernon L. Cognitive Learning in Children: Theories and Strategies. New York: Academic Press, 1976

17. Lidstone, John. Reading Improvement Through the Arts. New York State Department of Education, Albany 1979 (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED178 899)

18. Michigan State Department of Education. The Arts and Compensatory Education. Lansing: 1979 (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED170 757)

19. Murphy, Judith and Gross, Ronald. The Arts and The Poor: New Challenge for Educators. Washington, D.C.: Office of Education, 1968 (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED024 723)

20. New York University Center for Field Research and School Services An Evaluation of the 1972-73 Guggenheim Museum Children's Program "Learning to Read Through the Arts" ESEA Title I Program. New York: 1973 (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED111 903)

21. O'Brien, Bernadette C. Learning to Read Through the Arts and Humanities: A Reading Program - An Art Program. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED144 029)

22. Piaget, J. and Inhelder, B. Mental Imagery in the Child. New York: Basic Books, 1971

23. Silverman, Ronald H. and Hoepfner, Ralph. Developing and Evaluating Art Curricula Specifically Designed for Disadvantaged Youth. Washington, D.C.: Department of Education, March 1969 (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED030 707)

24. Weinstock, Ruth. Arts in the Curriculum. New York: The Arts, Education, and Americans, Inc., 1981